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and Comic Strips. (1972) Directed by: Andrew Martin. Pp. 10

This exhibit, consisting of fifty-seven works on paper, was
exhibited in the Weatherspoon Gallery of the University of North
Carolina at Greensboro, January 9 - 16, 1972.

The works have been recorded on 35 mm slides which are on
file at the Walter C. Jackson Library of the University of North
Carolina at Greensboro.

AN EXHIBITION OF DRAWINGS, CARICATURES,
AND COMIC STRIPS

by

Lawrence Stanley Gilliam

A Thesis Submitted to
the Faculty of the Graduate School at
The University of North Carolina at Greensboro
in Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Master of Fine Arts

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Approved by

Andrew Martin
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APPROVAL SHEET

This thesis has been approved by the following committee
of the Faculty of the Graduate School at the University of
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TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
I. Caricature	1
II. The Comic Strip Frame and My Drawings	2
III. My Working Methods	3
Figures 1 and 2	6
Figure 3	7
Catalog	8

I. CARICATURE

In 1967 I caricatured a friend who voiced objections to being "reduced to a comic book character." However, he did not realize that he had already "reduced" his life to certain artificial roles and power-identifications (with Freud, Nietzsche, and Sartre) by means of which he thought himself elevated above the mass of humanity. My characterization of him as a hypnotist-sorcerer, eyes gleaming, seemed appropriate.

However, just as everyone is charged with the task of becoming human, an artist must avoid dehumanizing his subjects in caricature unless it be necessary in order to point out the stereotyped socio-economic and psychosexual roles and group identities into which they have fit themselves, and through which they cut themselves off from those members of the human race who do not fit their concept of personhood. In my work any deviation from realism (loosely defined) may be counted as an editorial gesture. The human beings in the pictures with whom my sympathies lie are drawn in a way that takes into account their humanity. They are drawn with organic contours, avoiding grotesquerie. (Figure 1) The other figures, misshapen by the confines of their roles, appear inhuman in some way; having animalized, mechanized, and/or disembodied their humanity. (Figure 2)

Perhaps the chief esthetic strength of comic strips is that they appear to have been drawn by machines. But this polish ultimately represents an intolerable tyranny in that it turns human subjects into

puppets or mannikins, slaves to their roles. Since I as an artist am not forced by professional exigencies to illustrate idyllic stories about idols of the pop culture, I am free to make a personal statement about all of us and the roles we play, tempering my satiric insights with the sensitivities of human eye and hand. In the resulting tableaux the vitality of gesture and irregularity of line indicate a conviction that we are all yet becoming; that the human race itself is not yet finished.

II. THE COMIC STRIP FRAME AND MY DRAWINGS

In a comic strip the frame is the basic unit of pictorial narrative. Usually we are aware of what might have come before and what might come after any single frame because of our familiarity with the conventions of comic strip narrative. We know that since comic heroes' lives are timeless there are no temporally significant events in them. The characters are not really human beings; they neither suffer nor change. Even highly structured episodes often occur in temporal frameworks which are absurd or unconvincing. Consequently it hardly matters which bit of narrative we see in the ongoing life of Superman, Donald Duck, or Little Orphan Annie.

However, in contrast to comic strip artists we painters and "fine" artists have since the Middle Ages almost always found in the single picture surface an adequate format for the significant statement. This artistic habit has limited in my work the number and

extent of narrative multi-frame comic strips. Working from a visual rather than a literary standpoint the most convenient format for me has been the single page, on which evocative images coexist in a space determined by their visual interaction, rather than in a format dictated by the narrative function of comic strip design.

III. MY WORKING METHODS

My picture-making process generally begins with the drawing of a single image somewhere on the page. The image is drawn from a range of imagery in which I am interested: frame houses, old cars, friends, myself, snapshots, dream images, the comic book world, typography, and on and on. Then a second image suggested by or related to the first is set down on the page, perhaps integrated visually with the other by means of some illusionistic device such as lighting, perspective space, or framing. Further material may be added in order to complete an idea. An improvisational attitude is maintained for the strips as well as the single drawings, except that if a strip is foreseen I begin by drawing a box in the upper left hand corner of the page. (Figure 3)

Since these drawings are not designed for visual competition with gallery pictures but are rather to be read at arm's length by eyes moving from image to image, the compositional guidelines apropos to wall paintings do not apply. Instead, I am subject to the nominal demands of the small-scale, portable, and flexible book-page format, therefore being allowed a great deal of whimsy.

The risks inherent in improvisation are compounded by the use of a permanent medium such as India ink. The spontaneous ideas and accidents which occur during the process may interact constructively or destructively, even bringing on ruin or redemption for a drawing. This element of risk is exciting because it deprives me of complete control. Furthermore, by exposing my risk to the viewer I enter into an ethical relationship with him as one imperfect human being to another. In addition the risk of accident takes the responsibility for the final appearance of the drawing away from me, rendering it more accessible to others through the common experience of accident. The comparable accessibility of comic books is due to the checks-and-balances procedures in their production. Accident mediates between me and someone viewing a drawing of mine. The advice and consent of the production staff and several stages of graphic alteration mediate between the inception of an idea and the form it has when it reaches the reader in a comic book.

There is a further hazard in the free-associative method of responding to and organizing the ideas suggested by the improvised images. The inconstancy of one's intuition makes drawing in ink an act of faith. In my work a great deal depends on my ability to relate two diverse images in a third which emphasizes the ideas suggested by them in common. Good things are often possible, but percentages of satisfactory results vary. In an impasse it is sometimes

necessary to cut two images apart. However, in spite of the risks, drawing multiple images on a single sheet of paper enables me to provide appropriate balances of variety and unity in both image and implication.



Figure 1. "Mr. Man"

Figure 2. Detail
from "Unemployed"





Figure 3
"Ensign Gilliam Saves the Day"

CATALOG

- | | | |
|--|------------------|--------------------------|
| 1. "Home Again" | 12" x 17 1/2" | Ink and wash. |
| 2. "Snapshots" | 12" x 18" | Ballpoint and watercolor |
| 3. "Front Door" | 12" x 18" | Ink and wash. |
| 4. "Duplex in the Rain" | 11" x 8 1/2" | Ink. |
| 5. "Conception" | 22" x 17" | Ink and wash. |
| 6. "Regionalism" | 9 1/3" x 12 1/2" | Ink and wash. |
| 7. "Japanese Toybox
Home no. 1" | 17 1/2" x 12" | Watercolor. |
| 8. "Japanese Toybox
Home no. 2" | 22" x 17" | Watercolor. |
| 9. "On the Bum and On
the Beam no. 1" | 8 3/4" x 12" | Ink and wash. |
| 10. "On the Bum and On
the Beam no. 2" | 8 3/4" x 17" | Ink and wash. |
| 11. "Mister" | 8 1/2" x 11" | Ink. |
| 12. "Alive and Dead" | 17" x 22" | Ink. |
| 13. "Done In no. 1" | 9 1/2" x 12 1/2" | Wax crayon and ink. |
| 14. "Done In no. 2" | 17" x 22" | Ink. |
| 15. "Invariability of
Expression no. 1" | 17" x 22" | Felt tip marker. |
| 16. "Invariability of
Expression no. 2" | 17" x 22" | Felt tip marker. |
| 17. "Invariability of
Expression no. 3" | 17" x 22" | Felt tip marker. |
| 18. "Invariability of
Expression no. 4" | 17" x 22" | Felt tip marker. |
| 19. "The Man Became..." | 15 3/4" x 9 3/4" | Ballpoint. |

20.	"Women Mocked"	8 1/2" x 11"	Ink.
21.	"Masks"	8 1/2" x 11"	Black and green inks, watercolor.
22.	"Ensign Gilliam Saves the Day"	17" x 22"	Ink and wash.
23.	"The Man Behind the Wheel"	9 1/2" x 14"	Ink and wash.
24.	"Unemployed"	17" x 13 1/2"	Ink and wash.
25.	"Working Man's Comics"	10 3/4" x 13 3/4"	Ink and wash.
26.	"Possibilities"	10" x 12 1/2"	Ink and wash.
27.	"Camel St. Apts."	11" x 8"	Ink.
28.	"Kin We Git Inny?"	11" x 8"	Ink and wash.
29.	"Leadbelly Enters Prison"	14 1/2" x 13 3/4"	Ink, watercolor, and postage stamp.
30.	"The Ecstasy of Eliphaz"	16 3/4" x 17"	Ink, ballpoint, wax crayon, watercolor.
31.	"Southern Journey"	14" x 13 1/2"	Ink and watercolor.
32.	"Fella Name of Ray"	13 1/2" x 17"	Ink and wash.
33.	"Monkey Man"	16 1/2" x 11"	Ballpoints and watercolor.
34.	"Sheepskin Blues"	Three sheets, each 20" x 7"	Ink and wash.
35.	"Appointment"	23" x 8 3/4"	Ink.
36.	"Situation Comedy"	11 1/2" x 9"	Ink and wax crayon.
37.	"Law"	17 1/2" x 12"	Ink and wash.
38.	"Trouble at the Bijou"	11 3/4" x 9"	Ink and wash.
39.	"Boom Town People"	12 1/2" x 8 3/4"	Ink, wash, wax crayon, opaque watercolor.

40.	"A Ballad"	13" x 8 1/2"	Ballpoints, ink, and wash.
41.	"Hostility and Fear"	23" x 8 3/4"	Ink and wash.
42.	"Shadetree Mechanic"	17 3/4" x 12"	Ink and wash.
43.	"Horse Teeth"	22" x 17"	Ink and wash.
44.	"Functioning Typewriter"	19" x 12 1/2"	Ink and wash.
45.	"Frustrated Typewriter"	16" x 13 1/2"	Ink and wash.
46.	"Your M.C."	18" x 12"	Ink and wash.
47.	"Midnight Special"	18" x 12"	Ink and wash.
48.	"Souvenir"	12" x 19"	Ink and wash.
49.	"King Cotton"	8" x 10 1/2"	Ink.
50.	"Album Page"	13 1/2" x 16 3/4"	Collage, ink and wash, snapshot.
51.	"You and Me, Baby"	13 1/2" x 17"	Ink and wash.
52.	"Hey, Baby"	12" x 9"	Ink and wash.
53.	"Target"	9 1/2" x 26"	Ink and wash.
54.	"Chewing Gum"	17 1/2" x 12"	Ink and wash.
55.	"Singing Post Cards"	12" x 9"	Ink and wash.
56.	"Driving"	13 1/2" x 7"	Ink and wash.
57.	"Saw Mill"	11" x 8 1/2"	Green ink.